

## Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

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DCS Communications Office

**July 16, 2004**

### **This Week In Central Office**

#### Wednesday, July 14

Commissioner Miller visited the Memphis Child Advocacy Center, Peabody and Memphis Group Home in Shelby County.



Above (left to right): RA Antionette Holman , Executive Director for Juvenile Justice Ken Stevenson, DCS Commissioner Viola Miller & Memphis CAC Board Director Lucilla Garrett on the steps of the Memphis Child Advocacy Center.

### **The Week Ahead**

#### Monday, July 19

Commissioner Miller will travel to Bledsoe County and visit the Taft Youth Development Center staff. Miller will also visit the Cookeville Group Home in Putnam County.

Staff Contact: [Carla.aaron@state.tn.us](mailto:Carla.aaron@state.tn.us)

#### Wednesday July 21

Commissioner Miller will visit several group homes in the North East region. First, she will travel to Washington County to visit the following: North East Academy, Johnson City Boys Group Home and Johnson City O & A.

Miller will then travel to Carter County to visit with the staff of Elizabethton Group Home and Lift Academy.

Staff Contact: [Carla.aaron@state.tn.us](mailto:Carla.aaron@state.tn.us)

#### Thursday, July 22

Commissioner Miller will visit the Wilder Youth Development Center staff. She will then travel to Madison County to visit the Jackson Group Home.

Staff Contact: [Carla.aaron@state.tn.us](mailto:Carla.aaron@state.tn.us)

## Please Send Us Your July Events!

When submitting your **July** events for posting on the Internet calendar, please remember to include the following information:

- ✓ County and region
- ✓ Name and phone number of MAIN contact person
- ✓ Time, Date, Location and Purpose of event

Please send your events to [Rick.H.Mullins@state.tn.us](mailto:Rick.H.Mullins@state.tn.us)

*In other words ...*

*From your pen to your peers*

### **Ideas For Strengthening The DCS Foster Parent Program**

by Roane Co. HCCM Marjorie Lloyd

As a Home County Case Manager, I often deal with foster parents. Some are excellent foster parents with a good concept of being a part of a team and with great parenting skills. Other foster parents have poor parenting skills or they demonstrate a lack of commitment to the team concept.

I have recently had some very negative experiences with a few foster parents, including one incident when hospital personnel called me to say that certain foster children on my caseload should not leave with their foster mother because of extremely inappropriate behaviors on the foster mother's part in dealing with the children.

Another negative experience was when I accompanied a coworker who had been called out by foster parents late on a Saturday night to move two children simply because the older child had been rude to the foster parent. The foster parent refused to wait until a disruption staffing could be set up or even wait until Monday when those involved could have had a little time to try to get a sensible move (Foster parents often threaten to call the sheriff to pick up foster children if they are not moved immediately).

Partly because of the emergency nature of this move, these children were placed with foster parents who the Resource Placement person didn't realize were being investigated, so the children had to be moved again almost immediately.

In light of problems such as these, we need to consider some solutions. What can be done to strengthen our foster parent program? I have two suggestions to make:

#### **1. Establish a mentoring program for new foster parents.**

The foster mother I mentioned who had been so inappropriate with the foster children at the hospital actually had some good qualities as a foster parent. Her main problem was having little positive role modeling of good parenting in her own life.

Her parents had disciplined solely with whippings or a threat of a whipping. I saw her try to rely much too much on threats and her use of denial of privileges was not always appropriate. I tried to help her with her discipline weaknesses, but it didn't help in a crunch, when the boys in her care were in a wild frame of mind out in public.

After the incident, the foster parent cried and cried and told me she felt she had let the boys down. I began thinking then, what could have helped this woman learn parenting skills so that they were second nature to her in a time of crunch?

It came to me then, that perhaps, if she could have spent some time with a good foster mother, watching her handle discipline problem, things could have turned out differently.

I would suggest two stages for the mentoring process: **First**, it would be required that new foster parents would spend some time with foster parents of the same sex, observing them in the home and going out with their children to various events. This would give the new foster parents a visual image that would remain in their minds of how good parenting is done. Research has shown that observing modeled behavior from others is one of the most powerful influences on subsequent behavior of the one doing the observing.

The **second** stage of mentoring would be that the mentor would be available and would try to keep in close contact with the new foster parent when the new foster parents have children placed in their home. The mentor would be available for advice and would spend some time in the home observing the new foster parent in action. Mentors could qualify for special board rates or be reimbursed in some other manner.

2. **Set up on-going foster parent training that has an organized focus from our Department, instead of contracting out to other agencies for the training.**

What I envision is a specialist whose sole job is to train foster parents. Each region would have one or two specialists depending on the size of the region.

The worker should be a master's level professional, trained in child rearing, family systems, and in working with children at risk.

Training sessions of three hours each could be held in each county at least five times a year. Some sessions would include day meetings for those working nights.

If foster parents missed a session in their own county, they could make up sessions in a neighboring county. The specialist would get to know all the foster parents in the cluster and would hopefully encourage them to call him or her with difficult problems.

The specialist could send out regular letters containing parenting tips. The specialist would work with the Foster Parent Support Case Managers to encourage monthly participation in local foster parent associations. The trainings could be incorporated as a part of the foster parent association's monthly meetings.

The specialist would work with other specialists in the state to develop appropriate curriculum, but creativity would be allowed in how the material was presented.

The specialist would need to be a person who was fully committed to helping foster parents be the best they can be, rather than someone just trying to satisfy DCS requirements.

The "best a foster parent can be" should include fully cooperating with other members of a child's DCS and treatment team as well as possessing parenting skills such that a child has the best emotional and physical environment that is possible for his or her situation.

We have a good PATH training course as well as many excellent foster parents working for the Department. Foster parents are truly our foremost front line workers. Let's help them be what they truly want to be: the best foster parents possible.

*The End*

## **DCS Community Forums Kickoff!**

### ***DEPARTMENT SEEKS COMMUNITY INPUT AS CATALYST FOR CHANGE***

Commissioner Viola Miller launched a new initiative to collect feedback from communities across the state that can be used to determine how the department can better provide services to children and families, and the department began this series of community forums in Dresden on Tuesday, July 13.

"DCS was created eight years ago to provide the best possible care for Tennessee children who are at risk of child abuse, caring for those who have been removed from their homes as a result of abuse, and helping families through foster care, adoption and treatment and rehabilitation for delinquent youth," said Miller.

"Although we are making positive changes in the lives of families across the state each year, there is absolutely more we can be doing and ways we can do things better," Miller added. "That's why I'm announcing a series of community forums we're hosting across the state to hear firsthand from families their perspectives on how together we can work to protect children and families. I strongly believe gathering community input and working with those we serve is a valuable and necessary step in moving this department forward."

These public forums provide an opportunity for everyday citizens to express their ideas and opinions and they emphasize the importance of engaging communities in the issues that pertain to the well being of children and families.

Regional Administrators and Executive Directors from DCS Central Office will lead the discussions seeking the community's perspectives on what can be accomplished collaboratively to keep children safe.

To view a complete statewide community forum listing, please visit  
[www.state.tn.us/youth/CommunityForums.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/youth/CommunityForums.htm)

## **New DCS Employment Opportunities!**

Be sure to check the employee intranet for new employment opportunity postings.

Newest posting: [Ombudsman Program Coordinator](#)

## **Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children**

Online registration is now available for First Lady Andrea Conte's child advocacy center walk-a-thon! Please visit the link below to register for the statewide walk to raise money for Tennessee's CACs!

[www.active.com/event\\_detail.cfm?event\\_id=1149520](http://www.active.com/event_detail.cfm?event_id=1149520)



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## Blue Ribbon Update

By Randal Lea

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### **We Cannot do this Work Alone!**

#### Think about it:

If you had five children and had to leave two of them with a babysitter, what would you have to know in order to feel comfortable with their care?

You probably would want to meet the sitter and evaluate his/her temperament, qualifications and values. Perhaps you would ask for references from other families they have served. You might also want to be sure you are paying enough to get competent help - but not so much as to wreck your budget.

This scenario is just like the DCS relationship with private providers. We cannot do this work alone and at any given time about 2 of our 5 (40%) of our children are placed through a partner agency.

In general, contract agencies take care of our older children, children with greater behavioral or clinical needs, and children who have more than one barrier to permanency. These agencies provide direct clinical services or discrete security functions that enhance (but never replace) our responsibility for children in care.

Not everyone has the same temperament, qualifications, and values that DCS has regarding the care of children and families. The entire nation's juvenile justice and child welfare service delivery systems are moving away from "warehousing" children and moving toward treatment models which prove how their work changes lives of those they touch.

Leadership within DCS and the successful partner agencies of the present and near future are focusing their organizational models around service to families in the least restrictive settings that are in the best interests of the child and family involved. Successful leadership clearly emphasizes

family and community collaboration rather than "compliance" on behalf of the "patient." Successful leadership today demonstrates their commitment to children and families as physical, spiritual, and emotional human beings rather than objects to be controlled.

#### Why we need outside agencies:

Agencies do some things we cannot do - like raise money for better conditions for our children. Non-profits bring an estimated 15 million additional dollars in resources to the children we serve because their local communities trust those agencies to take care of our children.

Civic groups, foundations, and other charitable organizations will contribute dollars to child well being managed by a local agency that would not otherwise benefit the families we serve.

Sometimes, faith based community partners can recruit resource homes through their local network that DCS cannot reach. Sometimes, agencies can operate on a more efficient basis because they can change their employment patterns to meet the changing needs of our children and families. Despite the additional resources and competencies providers bring, we at DCS retain the parental role and responsibility of oversight. This means we have watch - often very closely - how our partners treat each child in our care. Even traditional partners of ours, despite our years of working together, must be open to unlearning and relearning as our entire field evolves into a better system.

Most people in our department have significant contact with courts, schools, provider agency staff, child advocates, or family members. Six helpful rules can govern our work with community professions:

1. Make certain we have exhausted local community resources or other systems of

support for children before we pay for services beyond our department;

2. Frequently ask yourself and others if we have engaged the partners we need to get results we want;

3. Model the professional behavior we want to see in our partners, regardless of how they act;

4. Sometimes, people just need to be heard completely; listening to someone does not cost a thing and often prevents huge misunderstandings later;

5. Before ending a meeting or phone call with our partners, always be clear about next steps and what party is responsible;

6. Frequently evaluate if your collaborative efforts are getting results for our children. If not, explore other options!

Another rule of thumb is to remember that anyone from DCS who sets foot in a partner agency speaks for the department; we must always avoid giving mixed messages by talking with each other within DCS to make sure our directions our answers, our concerns match up.

The more you know about your community partners, and the more frequently you talk with or visit them, the more comfortable you will feel with their care for our children.

*Randal Lea is Executive Assistant to the Commissioner and serves on the DCS Blue Ribbon Team. He is responsible for relations with private providers for DCS.*

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We fought hard. We gave it our best. We did what was right and we made a difference.  
~ Geraldine A. Ferraro

If you have a job without aggravation, you don't have a job.  
~ Malcolm Forbes

Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?  
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Character is the architecture of the being.  
~ Luise Nevelson

No matter what accomplishments you achieve, somebody helped you.  
~ Althea Gibson

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